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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a program utilized in the Countryside School which offers alternative learning environments in the elementary school. The program includes (1) semi-departmentalization; (2) team teaching; and (3) an open-alternatives program. Each of these areas is outlined and fully discussed in terms of student and parent needs. (YRJ)

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Alternative Learning Environments in the Elementary School

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by

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Introduction

Over past years, Countryside School has offered a selection of intermediate school organizational patterns to its students and parents. The selections that are offered are semi-departmentalization, team teaching approaches, and open alternatives approach. The students have been asked to bring this letter home so that between you and your child you may make this selection. To help you with this, I would like to furnish you with the following information:

Semi-Departmentalization

During the school year 1962-63, a great many meetings and discussions were held in which all concerned were able to participate and offer suggestions and opinions. A considerable amount of time was given to staff, parents and administrative personnel to air views and raise questions. This was accomplished thru the liberal use of staff meetings at all levels, PTA meetings, School Board meetings and even in small group situations such as lounge, coffee breaks, etc.

On April 18, 1963, the Edina School Board authorized the establishment of the semi-departmentalized method of organization in the upper elementary grades (four, five, six) for a trial period of three years beginning September, 1963.

In the presentation made to the Board of Education, several program hypotheses were made outlining benefits it was hoped would be obtained thru use of this form of organization.

Program Hypotheses:

I. Teacher Assignment
   (a) By assigning subject material areas to teachers on a more limited basis, it should be possible to make assignments more closely related to interest, competance, and training to the advantage of both teachers and pupils.

   (b) It would be possible to schedule this program so that the classroom teacher is subjected to fewer classroom interruptions than are present in other programs.

II. Developmental Possibilities
   Although there is no built-in excellence inherent in any type of organization, opportunities that may be taken advantage of should be possible under this program, such as:

   (a) Because of the narrowing of the subject matter responsibility, it is possbile to build in more structured curriculum development.

   (b) It is possible to schedule more specifically designed inservice education programming.

   (c) It is possible to direct the nature of the graduate work of the elementary teacher more specifically.

   (d) It is possible to develop more types of multiple grouping to meet the problem of individual differences.

III. Appraisal of Pupil Progress
   Because of the narrowing of subject matter responsibility, it is possible to appraise pupil progress in the various subject matter fields more accurately.

IV. Pupil Contact with Specialists
   (a) Pupils associate with several specialists under this program.
   (b) It is generally is possible to program students to have more contact with men.

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(c) It is possible to distribute the skills of outstanding teachers over a large number of pupils.

V. Adjustment to the Junior High School Program
It should be possible to build in and to observe an easier orientation and adjustment to the Junior High School program.

Mechanics:

The curriculum is divided into the following subject matter areas: Language Arts and Social Studies (including reading, spelling, writing, and social studies), mathematics, science, art, music, physical education and library class. Teachers were assigned to these areas on the basis of interest and competence, being given their first preference wherever possible. The language arts teacher also called home room teacher, would have two groups of students for three hours each per day, thus coming in contact with approximately sixty students. The math and science teachers each have six classes per day meeting a total of about 180 students. The science teacher also teaches art on the average of one period per week. These periods may be combined throughout the year to enable the teacher to work on more extensive projects. There is a music teacher and physical education teacher in our building who sees all students in the departmentalized area for either four half periods per week or two full periods per week. These two teachers also act as consultants to all other classes within our building when they are free of classes. A library class is conducted by the librarian one period per week for all the students. This period sharing the time allotted to music and physical education.

A student schedule might appear this way:

Period	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1	HOME ROOM				
2					
3					
	LUNCH				
4	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
5	VM	PE	Library	VM	PE
6	Science	Science	Science	Science	Art

Team Teaching

During the school year 1971-72 numerous meetings were held by the administration and faculty of Countryside School in an effort of arriving at a better organizational pattern for the intermediate grades that would allow us to move more consistently towards individualizing instruction for our children. Many plans were studied and researched during the time of these meetings. Also, at this time, many of our faculty members traveled about the state visiting schools that had implemented more innovative programs. We called in resource people from our district office who gave us an abundance of information on organizational patterns in the elementary school. After many meetings of discussion, planning, and research, many visitations, and a great deal of conversation with people from the instructional department, we finally arrived at a course of action for Countryside School. We decided that we would like to initiate a "Team Teaching Approach." We decided that we would want multi-aged, non-graded teams. We knew, however, what the complextion of our community was and that we would probably move at a slower pace than we would like.

We first set out to write tentative objectives for our teaming programs. These tentative objectives evolved into our permanent objectives for the year.

Objectives

I. To establish an environment conductive to meeting the needs of children. These needs may be identified as belonging, understanding, identification, guidance, responsibility, work, personal development, and self worth.

II. To implement a curriculum composed of curriculum adoptions and approved special programs.

III. To assess pupil competencies using appropriate diagnostic procedures.

IV. To prescribe learning tasks appropriate to pupil need.

V. To evaluate pupil progress at appropriate times in the instructional process.

VI. To provide contributions to public information relative to pupil progress and team goals and procedures.

We organized two teaching teams. One of the teams was made up of fourth and fifth graders while the other team was comprised of fifth and sixth graders. At first these teams were operating pretty much on a graded approach. However, as time went on, they have slowly evolved into non-graded teams.

The teaming approach involved just one-half of all students in grades four, five and six. The other half of the students in these grades were placed in semi-departmentalization.

Conclusions about Teaming

There are several conclusions that we have been able to reach while working through our years of non-graded, multiaged, interdesciplinary teaming. It is felt that the teams must be non-graded to insure that each student is placed or taught in relation to his ability. This will provide for an optimum learning environment. The question is sometimes asked: "Why should we use team teaching?" The one best answer to this is that it provides us with a more flexible schedule to operate within. It will also provide more people to assist in the instruction. And finally, it is the best way known to improve the competency of teachers.

The other advantages of teaming that became evident could probable be enumerated as follows:

1. Greater efficiency in personnel utilization which lowers student-adult ratio and allows for more realistic individualized instruction.

2. Flexibility of space, no space is "boxed in" for a defined purpose. Freedom of movement is a necessity.

3. More complete and elaborate centers are being readied for all areas. The economy of having full use of equipment and materials is a prime goal.

4. More extensive media can be readily available to all students and adults.

5. A more balanced program is insured for each student as no one teacher always teaches her "pet" subject.

6. Total staff growth is obviously a result of team teaching and the open-space concept. Teachers working and teaching together pick up "tricks-of the trade" from one another.

7. Each student can always find some adult with whom he can adequately relate in this structure.

8. Less walls are around to act as barriers and isolate subject areas, teachers, and students. This naturally brings about more communication between teacher - teacher, teacher - student, and student - student.

9. Greater efficiency of student movement.

Open - Alternatives Program

Introduction

During the 1972-73 school year, the Edina Board of Education approved the development and implementation of an open school education alternative for the 1973-74 school year. The program was approved with the condition that it be rigorously evaluated so as to demonstrate its value as an educational option. That alternative program has been in operation for four years, during which it has been undergoing continuous evaluation and adjustment.

Program Background

The Alternative School came into existence through Board action on April 9, 1973, as a result of a series of presentations by a group of interested parents. This community group set forth a philosophy of open education in the form of a series of 46 goals which delineated an educational setting in terms of organization, student opportunities, desirable teacher goals and goals to facilitate parental involvement in education.

Purposes for the Evaluation

The development of educational procedures and practices has gone on for decades with little or no serious challenge to their goals or strategies. The faith that education always has been, and always will be, was sufficient to convince tax payers to continue and even increase its support of this public institution. In recent years, however, a more sophisticated public faced with limitations in funds has begun to ask for "scientific" proof of the effectiveness of all of its social institutions, including education. The alternative educational environment at Countryside was an attempt to change and expand the Edina Educational program; and it must, therefore, be subject to the scrutiny of those who support that educational program.

In addition to contributing to the judgment regarding the value of the program, a second purpose for the evaluation was to assist the program developers with data related to decisions they face in program development and adjustment.

The Evaluation Strategy

The idea of a systematic and continuous evaluation of educational program is a relatively new one.

Summary and Conclusions: The Alternative Program at Countryside Elementary School has been in operation four years. The course of development has been guided by six general goals. These also guided the gathering of evaluation data.

These goals call for accurate perceptions of learners, parent, student and teacher decision making, an atmosphere of interpersonal concern, the continued acquisition of skills and knowledge, and overall staff coordination in order to facilitate learning.

The evidence gathered with regard to the accuracy of perceptions of learners by their parents and teachers revealed that parents were quite accurate in their perceptions from the outset of the program, and they remained accurate.

Responsibility for maintenance of the learning environment was assumed by student, parents and staff, each of whom appears to have been a resource for learning. Student attendance records reveal a very high rate of presence in school, and records of parental participation reveal that mothers were present at a rate of at least two perday each day. There was very little father participation. Further classroom interaction data reveals that student to student and parent to student interactions for learning occurred continuously.

An environment of interpersonal concern was attained, and it remained constant over the period of evaluation. The environment was seen by students as enthusiastic, democratic and satisfying. Further there was an absence of friction and favoritism. Observation of classroom behavior revealed a large predominance of constructive interpersonal interaction and 64% of the parents reported that their child was more skilled in interpersonal areas than prior to the program.

In the cognitive areas of reading, language arts, spelling, science, and social studies the students continued to gain skills and knowledge.

The general goals of the program have been reached during the first four years.

If you will be having a child in one of our programs and would like to make your preference known, you may merely detach the tear-off below, fill it out and have your child return it to his or her teacher.

WHENEVER A VARIETY OF SCHOOL ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERNS ARE OFFERED STUDENTS, IT BECOMES EVIDENT THAT SOME GAIN MORE ACCEPTANCE THAN OTHERS. EVERYTHING POSSIBLE WILL BE DONE TO HONOR YOUR REQUEST. THIS, HOWEVER, CANNOT ALWAYS BE GUARENTEED.

Tear Off

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